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SUBJECT: THE CYPRIOT PATH FROM JUNIOR OFFICER TO AMBASSADOR

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Cypriot Foreign Ministry is a relatively small institution, accepting a dozen new professionals per year; most are among Cyprus's best and brightest. New diplomats enter the corps through a hiring process lasting seven months. Once on board, an A100-like (but shorter) orientation follows, after which junior officers receive their portfolios and begin work. Lacking significant administrative and HR support, formal opportunities for training are scant, making career development highly dependent on personal initiative. Nonetheless, attrition is low, a product of mostly-excellent working conditions and a generous promotion ladder. The Ministry's Number 2 exercises near total control over the hiring and assignments process, giving him/her great ability to influence policy long after departing the service. End summary.

A SMALL MFA FOR A SMALL COUNTRY

12. (SBU) The MFA's size befits a country with just a half-century of independence and fewer than one million residents; both in square footage and workforce size its headquarters nearly mirrors U.S. Embassy Nicosia. Overseas, the Ministry maintains 35 bilateral embassies (high commissions in Commonwealth states) and nine multilateral permanent missions. The MFA's Permanent Secretary (D-equivalent) is charged with all diplomatic hiring decisions. The MFA recruits adult applicants from all walks of Greek Cypriot life, although anecdotally, most new hires are upper-class twentysomethings with graduate degrees, most having studied in the UK or United States. With the growth in higher education on the island, the MFA initiated its first internship program for Cyprus-based university students in August 2006.

ENTRY PROCEDURES AND MFA ORIENTATION

13. (SBU) Many diplomats have family members who also work in the MFA, but entry is ostensibly merit-based. The hiring process lasts approximately seven months and begins with announced vacancies that usually appear yearly on the MFA's website. Typically, about 10 to 15 openings become available annually. At a minimum, applicants must hold a bachelor's degree and be fluent in Greek and English. After submitting their on-line application, candidates take a two-day examination comprising five modules: general knowledge, Cypriot history, Greek language, English language, and knowledge of EU institutions. Successful candidates proceed

to interviews with a consultative committee of the MFA. The committee, composed of the Permanent Secretary and the Ministry's four most senior diplomats, ranks the candidates and nominates up to four individuals per vacancy. Nominees next attend interviews with the Public Service Commission, responsible for all civil servant hirings. The Commission then makes a final hiring decision based on a candidate's entire portfolio.

14. (SBU) Topical or regional experience and interest help determine new hires' divisional placement within the MFA, but only at the discretion of the Permanent Secretary. Otherwise, new diplomats receive assignments according to Ministry needs. Funding limitations and the absence of a Cypriot diplomatic academy condenses pre-job training into just four weeks, beginning with a two-week orientation that gives a "first understanding" of MFA practices and policies. General briefings from all divisional directors and lectures on the EU and its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) highlight this broad overview. A one-week session on the structure and functions of the Republic of Cyprus government follows at the Department of Public Administration's Personnel Division. Initial training concludes with a week in Brussels with other EU member states' new diplomats, covering EU relations and diplomacy. The session, run by the European Council, attracts attendees almost exclusively from the states that have joined the EU since 2004; Cyprus first participated in the program in 2006. One junior diplomat noted the program's value to his work at the MFA, saying it enlightened him to "what the EU is really about, and how Cyprus does and does not influence decisions at the EU."

YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN: LEARNING ON THE FLY

NICOSIA 00000691 002 OF 003

15. (SBU) After completing their one-month training, new diplomats receive a portfolio and start work immediately, an experience one JO likened to "being thrown into the deep end." Other MFA employees echoed her sentiments, but maintained the training was adequate. Most of a new diplomat's acclimatization to the MFA occurs on the job through the advice of supervisors and informal seminars. The MFA's small size and budget constrict its ability to convene or send employees to training courses, but it sponsors as many guest lectures as it can. The Ministry also takes advantage of the European Diplomat Program, which convenes five times per year in various European capitals with the intent of informing new hires about EU practices and developing lower-level diplomatic networks between EU states. The Ministry also provides a limited number of foreign language lessons to its diplomats, with an emphasis on French, in preparation for Cyprus's European Union Presidency in the second half of 2012. No personalized training exists within the MFA, however. A close contact in the Middle East division lamented the lack of area-specific seminars or programs and noted the MFA relied heavily on diplomats' prior experiences to develop expertise in their respective portfolios.

ASSIGNMENT ABROAD: "A JACK OF ALL TRADES"

16. (SBU) New hires are eligible for assignment to foreign posts after one year at headquarters. An internal catalog circulates every February soliciting openings at overseas missions. A diplomat's rank, experience, and preference factor into the decisions, but the Permanent Secretary distributes assignments in line with MFA priorities. Existing language knowledge affects assignments, but there are no requirements (e.g., German proficiency is not mandatory for assignment to Berlin). Diplomats receive word of the decisions in late March and depart for their new posts

in September. Assignments typically last four years, and Cypriot diplomats are allowed to serve up to nine consecutive years abroad; there is no cumulative time-limit for overseas service over an entire career. Most Cypriot missions are small, with diplomats working across sections. Even in a relatively large post like Paris, for example, one contact shuffled between political, consular, and cultural affairs offices.

MOVIN' ON UP, WITHOUT OUTSIDE HELP

¶7. (SBU) While divisional and post assignments do not always reflect personal preferences, promotions are virtually guaranteed for all MFA employees. All public servants receive annual evaluations, but more than 95 percent of government employees garner "excellent" reviews. Consequentially, employees move up the ranks regardless of actual job performance; one JO stated that any diplomat who achieves the rank of second secretary, which usually occurs after five years with the MFA, almost assuredly will become a first secretary within two more years and eventually retire as an ambassador (Reftel). She called the system "very outdated and problematic," occasionally leading to less than satisfactory leadership. The government has planned to investigate the practice of promotions, but for the moment, "no one really questions the system."

¶8. (SBU) Nevertheless, certain behaviors can jeopardize a career at the MFA, including political activity. Political pressures and perspectives intrude on the functions of many Cypriot businesses and other government ministries, but contacts at the MFA repeatedly stressed the general absence of partisan politics from the ministry's daily work. A junior diplomat noted that although many diplomats' political leanings are known, few discuss their beliefs openly with their colleagues. He attributed this behavior to the MFA's need to function through political power shifts and to most diplomats' desire for longevity at the MFA -- outspoken backing for any particular party or candidate could prove detrimental after a change in government.

¶9. (SBU) Like most Cypriot government employees, MFA diplomats enjoy strong union representation. The Pancyprian Public Employees Trade Union (PASYDY) has an MFA branch that focuses on seeking improvements in employment conditions, salaries, and benefits. PASYDY speaks with a respectable voice on behalf of its members and seems to have had some success -- the MFA workday runs only until 1430 most days,

NICOSIA 00000691 003 OF 003

for example. Some diplomats have complained over the union's constant calls for workforce-wide votes on numerous topics, however, which have caused a certain degree of apathy, especially among those serving tours abroad.

DIPLOMATS FEEL VALUED, SATISFIED

¶10. (SBU) The majority of junior and mid-level Cypriot diplomats appear pleased with their jobs. Despite the "severe" shortfall in formal training, one believed she was prepared enough for her first day's work, and that while additional instruction would have been valuable, the minimal preparation had made her first year "quite exciting." Another noted that, since the absence of just one coworker is felt Ministry-wide, each employee feels valued. Diplomats expressed their disappointment with some of the bureaucratic methods that slow many MFA projects, however, and some took exception to the generational gap in technology use, whereby many senior officials remained wary of using modern communications like e-mail.

¶11. (SBU) The Cypriot MFA is capable and competent despite its small size and limited budget. The diplomatic corps draws many of the country's best and brightest to its ranks, attracted both by public sector perks and a desire for service to the (Greek Cypriot) nation. The Permanent Secretary plays the most important role in the development of

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the diplomatic corps, with far more significance than even the FM. The near-total control of the hiring process, assignments, and training curriculums gives the incumbent great leverage to influence the MFA's practices long after his term ends. Many of the junior diplomats consulted for this telegram, for example, hold horribly hard lines vis-a-vis Turkish Cypriots and Turkey, positions mirroring those of former PermSec and mentor Sotos Zakheous. The MFA's newest hires are entering during the tenure of Alexander Zenon, a lower-profile diplomat whose ideology is tougher to read. We doubt the new JO's will be calling for an end to "so-called Turkish Cypriot isolation" or lamenting the T/Cs' lot anytime soon, however.

SCHLICHER